

Where Is It To Be Found?

A series of articles on the relevance of
"Elpis Israel" to present-day trends

"O that men could be induced now to devote themselves to the study of the scriptures without regard to articles, creeds, confessions, and traditions! These things are mere rubbish; monuments of the presumption and folly of former generations indoctrinated with the wisdom from beneath. If a Berean spirit could be infused into them; if they could be persuaded to "search the scriptures daily" for the truth as for hid treasures, they would soon leave their spiritual guides alone in all their glory of mysticism and patristic lore, and rejoice in the liberty of that truth which can alone make them 'free indeed.' The gospel invites men to enter into the kingdom of God. The way of entering is made exceedingly plain in the Bible ... Knowledge is the key to remission, or release from sins, and to an entrance into the kingdom of God. No one can enter this kingdom in his sins, and destitute of a character approved of God." — Page 199.

Are Christadelphians a community of dedicated Bible students, as was the case a century ago? At one time it was not uncommon to hear adherents of other religious groups acknowledge — albeit it, grudgingly — that Christadelphians "knew their Bibles." Would such comments be true today? Is *Elpis Israel* readily available on the bookshelves of our homes?

From 1849 *Elpis Israel* became the standard text book from which Christadelphians expounded the fundamental truths of the Bible, and directed attention to the Scriptures themselves. It became the book to which they consistently referred in

renewing their own understanding of basic elements of the One True Faith, yet it was never written to replace the Holy Scriptures, nor to be elevated to equality with God's Word. Phrases such as "the Bible is the enlightener ... the scriptures contain the keys ..." constantly recur in its pages.

Saved Only By The Truth

Brother Thomas wrote: "It is of primary importance that we believe the truth, and not a substitute of it; for it is by the truth only we can be saved" (p. 188).

He never considered his own words as equal of holy writ, nor

sought to establish upon his own writings a new religion or cult. Nevertheless, under the hand of Providence, he re-discovered apostolic truth, and, with outstanding ability, expounded it to others. "It is our wisdom," he declared, "to receive nothing which has not the sanction of their (apostolic) authority. Paul styles everything else but what he preached 'another gospel,' that is, a perversion of the gospel of Christ; and as we can only be saved by belief of the truth, such a gospel is both useless and injurious" (p. 189). Hence: "all writers and speakers must be unceremoniously tried by this; for, God hath said, that 'if they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them'." "It matters not who the sinner may be: pope, cardinal, archbishop, bishop, minister, or their admirers; or, even one of the saints of God or an angel himself; nothing he may say or write must be received unless in strict conformity to this word: and of this the people must judge for themselves upon their own responsibility ... To this Book, then, we appeal for light" (p. 170).

Brother Thomas considered reputation to be of no importance. He did not seek to have his expositions accepted with alacrity or ceremony. On the contrary, his constant appeal was that men and women should examine all that he said — as well as the words of others — in the light of the revelation to be found only within the pages of God's Word.

Is Its Value Appreciated?

When quoting the words of the apostle, who stated that the word of reconciliation had been "committed" to the apostles, Brother Thomas commented with characteristic earnestness: "Not, be it most distinctly understood, to me;

nor to the ecclesiastics of any sect, party, or denomination, extant. The Word of reconciliation hath been committed to no man, or set of men, now living ..." (p. 158).

Since there has never been an uninspired exposition of the fundamental message of the Scriptures equal to *Elpis Israel* since apostolic times — so far as the present writer is aware — *Elpis Israel* ought to be found prominently respected in the Christadelphian community in these present difficult times. But, it seems that its influence is apparent in few areas of the Brotherhood.

How many read, study and refer to it to assist their individual Bible study? We well recall hearing the late Bro. John Carter state that he made a point of rereading *Elpis Israel* every year; and upon being questioned as to why he did so, he replied simply: "Just to make sure I keep my feet on the ground" which we understood to be a colloquialism to signify the need to maintain sound thinking on the Truth and a clear understanding of that which is scripturally correct. Yet, how many recognize and endorse the importance and value of *Elpis Israel* as expressed by Bro. Carter? How many ecclesias promote its study, and respect the fact that the very foundation of Biblical exposition upon which our community was established is in the truths expounded in *Elpis Israel*?

The Spirit of the Truth

The impact of *Elpis Israel* upon the minds of its readers is not limited to the *teachings* it presents — but includes its firm, solid, unequivocal demonstration of the *spirit of the Truth*. Such a vigor is found in such words as: "The pulpit orators of this age are either greatly deceived, or, if their eyes be open, most egregiously impose upon the credulity of the

public, in pretending to be Christ's ambassadors to the world. Why, they are the world's allies; the friends and supporters of Satan's kingdom; whose subjects pay them their wages on condition of *preaching such doctrine as suits them!*" But of the apostles of the Lord, he wrote: "These are the men whom He (Yahweh) appointed, who sought not to please the public, but to enlighten them."

We rarely hear such direct, powerful words today. Often the line of demarcation between "pulpit orators" and Christadelphians expositors is very difficult to distinguish. But Bro. Thomas spoke truthfully; apostate preachers, no matter what they may call themselves, are "the world's allies," and whether they know it or not, they are also "the friends and supporters of Satan's kingdom."

It is tragic that many brethren are being weakened from the Truth by the philosophical writings of pulpit orators, preferring their "great swelling words of vanity" to the sound and uplifting expositions of our pioneer brethren.

Clarity and Disposition Needed

Many major problems which confront and sometimes divide the Brotherhood today are due to the fact that *Elpis Israel* no longer holds the honoured and respected position it once did on Christadelphian bookshelves. Yet if the Truth is to survive in these closing days of Gentile darkness, its clarion voice must be clearly, fearlessly and courageously proclaimed, both within and without the Brotherhood. The One Body of Christ is rapidly running out of opportunity. The Lord is at hand. There is no more time for empty discussions on profitless questions than there is for any further eroding of our foundations.

There is an imperative need to return to the spirit and word of our pioneer brethren.

Ignorance Cannot Save

Bro. Thomas wrote about a saving faith: "There is no true religion without faith; nor any true faith without the belief of *the truth* ... The ability to believe, lies in a sound understanding, a candid disposition, and knowledge of the testimony of God. Where there is ignorance of this there can be no faith. It is as impossible for a man ignorant of God's word to have faith as it is for a man to believe another guilty of an alleged crime who knows nothing at all about the matter... The faith of the religious world is like a stool with only one leg. It *professes* to believe in Jesus, but it is ignorant and therefore faithless of *the message* he was sent to deliver to Israel... To believe the one and reject the other is stultification. The 'religious world' has placed itself in this predicament; and unless it believes the whole truth, which is not likely, it will be cut off as was Israel in the days of old..." (pp. 162-163).

Thus Bro. Thomas depicts the professing world of christianity. But what of those who have constituted the true Body of Christ? Bro. Thomas quotes the words of Samuel, "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams..." and adds, "A great principle is set forth in these words. It is that which can alone place men in harmony with the religion of God... Religion is of two kinds — that, namely, which is invented by the thinking of sinful flesh; and that which is revealed of God... When men are moved by the spirit they are 'moved by the truth,' and do not talk nonsense. They speak according to 'the law and the testimony;' and thus evince to all who understand the scriptures that they have *light within*. Everything spoken not according to the word is nonsense..."

Danger of Fleshly Philosophy

Bro. Thomas warned of the danger of being numbered among those who "offer verbal sacrifices without end," and who "sit only as the listless hearers of the 'eloquence' presented according to their taste" (pp. 163-164). No power from the Word of God enters their minds, nor illuminates their thinking (Psa. 119:105; 130; Prov. 30:5).

The influence of such apostate religious philosophy will injure the Body of Christ. Those who practise and passively endorse such deceits "have nothing to do with the word of reconciliation, except to pervert it and to bring it into disrepute..." In fact, "the principles of the apostasy, and indeed of all false religion, are such as result from the thinking of the flesh when left to its own communings." Hence, "the world is full of religions, all of which have been invented" (pp. 158-160).

Are the philosophies of "invented" religions to become accepted within our community? Are those who fail to uphold the purity of the Truth to be encouraged? Are false teachers, who undermine the foundations of the Christadelphian faith, to be tolerated in a spirit of inertia? Will dullness of comprehension result in many being led away from the truth?

Let "times of refreshing" spread throughout the Christadelphian community — warmly, enthusiastically, encouragingly, harmoniously. May brethren and sisters everywhere be deeply moved by the significance of the times, and the urgency of the days.

Brethren and sisters must be encouraged to open the pages of *Elpis Israel* within the home and ecclesia; to remember the heritage received from earlier generations, seeking to understand and embrace the Truth in its purity, repudiating all attempts to

undermine and weaken "the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42).

Let us never forget that "it is the preachers that make men infidels by the preposterous absurdities they preach in the much-abused name of Christianity" (p. 319). True Christadelphians have no desire to be, in any way, identified with such forms of religion.

The signs of the times indicate that opportunity is short. "If a man believe and obey the gospel his past sins are forgiven him in Christ; but, if after this he walk in the course of the world his faith is proved to be dead, and he forfeits his title to eternal life" (p. 261). The Body of Christ must therefore be united in building firmly and unerringly upon the sound foundations laid in the past. "The time is come in which there must be no faint-heartedness, and when a courageous testimony must be borne for the word of the kingdom. Ministerial favour and popularity must be utterly disregarded; and the question be not, 'What saith the minister?' or, 'What will people think?' It matters not what they say, or think, in the case; the simple question is, 'How is it written?' 'What saith the word?' Let this course be pursued in candour, and I doubt not, but in a short time a people will spring up in these islands prepared for the Lord, whom he will acknowledge at his return" (p. 389).

When the exposition, the disposition and the zealous dedication to the cause of Christ, as so clearly shines forth in the pages of *Elpis Israel* — when the works of our pioneer brethren are restored to their rightful place within our community, being not only verbally endorsed but diligently studied and imitated, with Bible in hand and foremost in the affections, then, indeed, there will be made "ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17). J. Ullman (WA)